



## Notes from LEAD Editor

Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch once said, "My view of the 1990s is based on the liberation of the workplace. If you want to get the benefit of everything employees have, you've got to free them – make everybody a participant. Everybody has to know everything, so they can make the right decisions by themselves." This quote still holds true today as the workplace grows ever more complex. Successful organizations understand that empowering employees is absolutely essential. Thought-provoking articles in this month's **LEAD**, discuss the basic principles of employee empowerment as well as the benefits.

LEAD article

## CREATING AN EMPOWERED ENVIRONMENT

**E**mpowerment is when employees own their jobs and are able to measure and influence their success. Empowered employees are energetic, passionate, and want to do a better job because they feel personally rewarded for doing so. Empowerment creates an environment that nurtures and encourages employee initiative, creativity, innovation, and encourages employees to share their ideas. For empowerment to work, remember these tips:

🔗 Provide employees information about the business and demonstrate how their work fits into the big picture. Job satisfaction is increased when employees find meaning in their work and understand how their work affects other employees and the company as a whole.

🔗 Employees need to understand the organization's strategic goals and how their work impacts the achievement of those goals. This kind of information creates the buy-in necessary to generate dramatic and ongoing improvements in the organization.

🔗 When you demonstrate the value individuals bring to the business, employees will want to grow. As employees begin to understand the business, the goals that they are working toward, and how their contributions fit into the company's larger business goals – they will begin to find greater meaning in their work.

🔗 Employees must have the necessary skills and resources to be able to accomplish their jobs. Having the skills and ability to do a job well is one of the most important dimensions of empowerment – team and interpersonal skill training are especially important.

🔗 Provide continued and positive reinforcement. Recognize and celebrate employee successes.

-Adapted from "Do You Have an Empowered Environment?" by Shari Caudron, *Personnel Journal*, Vol. 74, No. 9

## The Cultural Shift

**Empowering the workforce involves an organizational cultural shift. It begins by encouraging employees to take initiative and to perform in their own style. Here are some important tips to empowerment:**

**Authority** – Authority is the fuel that drives the organization when you empower employees. At a minimum, you should entrust enough authority to get the work done and allow employees to take initiative.

**Oversight** – Try not to get involved in employee operations so closely that you stifle them. Periodic updates and meetings are a great way to stay informed.

**Coaching** – Empowerment is effective when you have good communication, and the organization/managers listen to employees. Ask questions to make sure employees understand their jobs, and provide the support and resources they need to accomplish them.

**Encourage Creativity** – Allow employees freedom to do things their way and remember to judge results – not methods. No two people perform exactly the same in every situation, so be prepared to recognize the value of different actions and methods.

**Empowerment** – Employees want ownership of their work/jobs and want to know what they are being held responsible for. The more employees understand, the better they are able to perform. When employees are able to "own" their work, they feel more empowered.

-Adapted from "Managing a Small Business" by The Small Business Knowledge Base, [www.bizmove.com](http://www.bizmove.com)





# EMPOWERMENT

Employee empowerment provides people the responsibility and authority to make decisions. Empowerment frequently results in greater commitment and cooperation; creative ideas and solutions; and greater ownership from employees. Creating an empowered workforce is a great way to increase:

- 1 **Buy-in and cooperation from the whole organization.** For example, employees feel more committed to the organization when they are involved in the decision-making process.
- 2 **On-the-spot decision-making.** For example, employees who work in customer service need to be able to quickly respond to customer needs and problems without having to constantly go up the chain of command.
- 3 **Solving complex problems.** Employees directly involved with a problem can better determine the optimal solution. For example, a work group can figure out how to re-engineer its work processes far better than employees/managers that do not directly work on the process/project.

Remember, competent hard-working employees feel discouraged when they have someone looking over their shoulder telling them what to do. Empowerment works when you give employees the necessary resources and make yourself available to help. When employees are properly trained and managed, they are able to successfully perform and make effective decisions.

-Adapted from Susan Gebelein's *The Successful Manager's Handbook*, March 2001, Personnel Decisions International, Workforce.com

## EMPOWERING THE WORKFORCE

An empowered workforce has the ability to produce greater workplace efficiency. To empower employees remember three things: **Plan, Coach, and Encourage.**

**Plan** - goals, meetings, and tasks. Identify teams and employees. Prepare each employee by sitting down and discussing what empowerment means. Make sure that everyone understands the boundaries and how empowerment can improve results. Explain upcoming jobs/responsibilities and how empowerment will allow them better decision-making abilities.

**Coach** - employees and keep them on track. Leave room in the job description for ingenuity/initiative. Make sure employees have the necessary authority to do the job properly. Keep in touch with employees to provide them the necessary support and resources. Most importantly, focus on the results and accept alternative approaches.

**Encourage** - boost morale and praise/acknowledge a job well done.

-Adapted from "Employee Empowerment" by The University of Edinburgh, 2001, [www.ee.ed.ac.uk](http://www.ee.ed.ac.uk)

## STEPS TOWARD EMPOWERMENT

Effective employee empowerment involves four parts: the importance of people; learning and skill development; total organizational effort; challenging and exciting work. These parts can be achieved by remembering five points:

☞ Employees must build confidence. Participation in decision-making and developing work solutions provides employees with confidence and control in their work.

☞ An effective organization needs coaches who can facilitate the process. Leaders need to encourage and coach employees toward success.

☞ Be clear about strategic goals, missions, objectives, and boundaries. Once this communication is completed, step aside and give employees the time and

latitude to work. Clarity helps employees better understand the project/work and allows them to use their skills to best complete the projects.

☞ People in every part of the organization need to feel empowered and encouraged to be able to do things their way. Leaders know that their job is to establish the boundaries, and then move aside. Learn to establish freedom within limits and give people room to put forth their best ideas within those boundaries.

☞ Trust employees. When empowered employees are working together and trust is present, employees are able to make the necessary decisions and correct any mistakes/problems they encounter.

-Adapted from "Empowerment Strategies" by Terry L. Paulson, [www.changecentral.com](http://www.changecentral.com)

### CONTACT US:

LEADNewsletter@ocgov.com or 714.834.4039

County of Orange

